

THE
**BROAD RIVER
REVIEW**



THE LITERARY REVIEW OF GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY

THE
BROAD RIVER
REVIEW

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THE
B R O A D R I V E R
R E V I E W

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Silas House's "The First Day" appeared previously on National Public Radio.

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Autumn's Promiscuity

The evening ball,
The cycle
Preparing, hiding away all year long
Her secret splendor.
She enters on the scene in a blaze,
Her slender limbs dancing in the breeze
Yellow, orange, red tulle
Draped around her shoulders and curving lines
Sending sensual shivers down the spines
Of her onlookers, who shake in the
Cooling breeze that ushers her in the door.
Jeweled in rubies, amber and gold
She is barefoot, her toes sinking and seeping
Into the upchurned earth
Already expectant for the spring.
She quietly unrobes before her lover
Her gown slowly falling
From shoulders to waist to toes until
The luxurious garment
Piles around her
And she stands bared,
Naked in her thinness
Her beauty fading
Forgotten
By the first chilly breeze
The first icing of frost
And her garments are kicked around,
Gathered up like the previous night's
Residue of grandeur
Stained, trampled
Of no use for next year's ball.
Her garments are the stained tablecloth
Abandoned party favors
Crumpled splotched napkins

That blotted tepid red wine from party dresses
The reddest of the red wines only now ringing
The bottom of plastic cups,
Remnants with lipstick prints,
A lingering but finished kiss
Laid upon the lips.
Only the constant silver is still set out,
Silver is adorned in its iciness
In its icy colorless sterility
That leaves her shivering naked through the winter.

Papa

I always loved Papa the most. I think he loved me the most, too, though he never actually told me that. There are some things you never have to say; there are others you wish you had.

Every Sunday, right after church and before we had a chance to rub the clean off our faces, our mother would load Bobby, my little sister Anna, and me into our 1957 Ford station wagon and we'd head over to our granddaddy's house. The car was one of those that had wood panels on both sides but its most distinguishing feature was a long scratch down the driver's side which had resulted from an errant bicycle ride of mine. The scratch on my knee had healed quickly but the one on the car had remained — in silent testimony to the mistakes of youth. Papa had always said that when I got old enough to drive we were to remind him to never ride anywhere with me. Papa was so funny.

My three cousins, who were all remarkably close in age to us, would come there too and invariably arrived at about the same time we did and after the obligatory argument over who got to ring the doorbell, we would wait, bright-eyed and expectant, for the big white door to swing open. When it finally did, Papa would always be standing there. (At that time, I'm not certain I actually knew his real name.) And before each corner of his huge smile could reach its respective ear, the whole lot of us piled on him and we would cover him like dew on a red rose.

Within the span of a heartbeat, there would be six little hands probing every one of his pockets — looking for the flavorful treasures that we knew lay within. I suppose it would have been polite to say "hello" or something like that first, but a moment's delay might cost you a prized red candy. It was a chance no one could afford to take.

Just like clockwork, Grandma would call out, "Papa, you're going to ruin those children's dinner." (I'm sure she must have known his real name but I don't think I ever heard her say it.) Now, if the truth be known, none of us really cared if dinner was going to be ruined because we knew that beyond the kitchen door awaited an endless assortment of green, yellow, and orange foods

that only a grown person could possibly like. Certain it would somehow protect us from what lay beyond, we would hurriedly stuff as many of the treats into our mouths as we could before daring to venture into the realm of the multicolored foods.

When lunch was finally over, we would go outside and play with Papa's dog. He had a scruffy old white dog named Midnight. I'll never know why he named a white dog Midnight, but that's just what he did. Papa had his ways.

He always said, "What Midnight lacks in good looks, he doesn't make up for in brains." Grandma said the dog was, what she called, "good natured." Sometimes, he'd even let little Anna sit on his back like a pony. And so, with our hands still sublimely sticky from a few more candies after lunch, we would wrestle and play with Midnight until it was unclear which of us (dog or child) had more white hair stuck on them.

Every now and then, in the summer, we'd get to spend the night over at Papa's house. With six children wound up tight, the ruckus sometimes wouldn't stop until way past ten o'clock when, finally exhausted, we would have to give up the day and tumble onto our beds. (The lucky ones got to sleep on the floor.) There we would all await dreams of adventures yet to come and of candy yet to consume.

Papa liked to read to us at night out of a big old family Bible and tell us stories about all the people in there. One of his favorites was about some guy named Job who really got himself into a bad fix. Papa said it wasn't all of his own doing but, no matter whose fault it was, he ran into nothing but one trouble after another. Grandma said that Papa was a lot like Job because he never got upset about anything.

Sometimes he'd let me sit on his lap when he read. He would run his finger along the words so I could see what he was reading. I don't think he realized that I was already in the third grade and could read a lot of the words for myself. I'm also pretty sure he wasn't saying Job's name exactly right because it was shaped just like my daddy's name "Bob," but that wasn't the way Papa pronounced it at all. I never told him any different because I didn't want to embarrass him – it being his favorite story and all.

One night after all the others had fallen asleep, he read to me about another fellow whose name was Thomas. He said a lot of people disapproved of Thomas because he was a "doubter" or something like that. Papa told me he didn't think that was fair —

people talking bad about him like that -- because Thomas was just being honest with everybody and didn't mean any harm. He told me that you should never criticize a man for being honest. He also said that I sometimes reminded him of Thomas because I always had so many questions about everything. He even told me one night he hoped I would grow up some day and be a good and honest man just like Thomas.

The next morning (which was Saturday) after we all got up, he was going to take us fishing at the little pond that was down below the house. Even the girls were coming along so it was going to be real important to catch the biggest fish.

Earlier that night, Papa had shown me the new Heddon Lucky 13 fishing lure he had bought at the hardware store. It was a beauty. He told me he had paid two dollars for it. He must have been the richest man in the world to pay two whole dollars for a fishing lure. I meant to ask him about that.

Before I went to sleep and while no one was looking, I sneaked back into his room and took the lure and hid it deep within the recesses of his tackle box. That way, in the morning, I would be the first to find it. Saturday was going to be my day and the others were going to be in awe of all the fish I was going to catch.

To a passing motorist, we must have looked like a strange sight as we wound our way down the overgrown path that led to the pond where the unsuspecting fish awaited. Papa, naturally, led the way and behind him were six children, like ducks in a row, stepping high and long to make sure that their feet landed exactly in the footprints of our gray haired leader. That way no creature of the undergrowth could possibly nip off a wayward toe.

After running to the best fishing spot and having secured the hidden treasure from the tackle box, I began to tie it on to my line. Papa saw what I was doing and said, "Son, how would you like for me to show you how to tie a genuine fisherman's knot?" I assured him that I was quite skilled at tying knots and besides, it was half done now. He looked at me for a second, as if he wanted to say something else, thought differently about it, and then, with his back to me, began to help my little sister Anna with her pole.

I knew for sure that the biggest fish had to be way out in the middle in the deepest water, so, with all my might, I heaved the lucky lure toward the center of the pond. I watched with a certain arrogance as it hurtled through space and then, in an instant,

felt pride turn to horror as I realized that no line was trailing after it. I stood frozen in my place, unable to move, my mouth gaped wide open.

Papa must have sensed that something was wrong because he stopped what he was doing, came over, and asked me if I was OK. There I stood, holding a fishing rod with only two feet of line protruding from its end. He asked me what had happened, and after a only a moment's hesitation, I did the unthinkable. I told him that the biggest bass I had ever seen had broken my line and his new fishing lure was now gone. Barely able to speak above a whisper, my voice trembled as I told him.

Papa rubbed his chin slowly and looked at me for what seemed an eternity. Maybe he wanted to see if I had anything more I wanted to say to him. I don't know for sure. I do know that, by then, I was trembling all over. When he realized that my lips were going to form no more words, he leaned over and put his arms around me and said, "That must have been some fish, Son." Right there, in front of everybody, I cried as hard as I ever have in my whole life.

That night I went to bed well before anyone else and had been there only a few minutes when Papa walked slowly into my room. He sat down on the edge of my bed and looked at me with an inquiring expression not unlike the one I had seen earlier in the day at the pond. My eyes were affixed to his – afraid to see and afraid to look away. He said, "Son, you've had a hard day, haven't you?" I nodded.

"Is there anything else you want to talk to Papa about?" I wanted to look away but couldn't. I said nothing. "Do you mind if I sit with you a minute?" he said. I nodded again. Now, completely transfixed by his eyes, we sat in silence for what seemed a lot longer than it could have been.

I could say nothing more. The silence of the moment roared in my ears. Finally he brushed the hair back out of my eyes and I swear to you that his eyes sparkled in the dark.

He whispered, "I sneaked something in here for you. Don't let Grandma know or she'll skin us both." (I had already brushed my teeth.) Reaching into his shirt pocket, he pulled out a big red lifesaver and slipped it gently into my mouth. It was (and still is) the sweetest thing I ever tasted in my life. Before it had time to melt, he took out a second one just like it and put it into the shirt pocket of my light green pajamas and said, "Papa wants

you to have another one in case you need it later."

He looked bigger than I had ever seen him before. He smiled gently and then walked out of the room as silently as he had come in. I wanted to cry again but this time there were no tears left.

I still remember the events of that night and the next morning as if it were only yesterday. There are some memories that time cannot fade. Sleep had come slowly to me and for that reason I overslept. Finally, when I did awaken and saw how high the sun was, I knew that I had missed Papa's morning walk.

I needed to talk to Papa right away. I hurried downstairs to find him but at once knew that something was not right. I heard voices coming from the living room. They were voices that I had heard before but they were spoken in quiet tones which were altogether unfamiliar to this house.

I hid behind the big oak table and tried to listen. My mother was sitting on the couch with her head in her hands. My dad was talking to someone I didn't know. I couldn't hear everything that was said but heard words about doctors and hearts and something about there was nothing that they could do.

I heard no names mentioned but a feeling of dread came over me and I ran as fast as I could back to my room and pulled the covers back over my head. It was as if they might shelter me from the words I didn't want to hear and the dark images that were haunting me.

That was thirty years ago. Grandma lived another twenty-two years before she died. She spent the last two in a nursing home with what the doctors called dementia. She couldn't recognize us anymore but remained a sweet and gentle soul to the end. Bobby works for a car dealership over in the next town. Little Anna has two handsome children and is now thinking about going back to graduate school. I hope she does because she was always the smartest one.

I also think that I've lived a good life. I've tried to, at least. I have children of my own and believe my highest aspiration is to be a granddaddy myself one day. I've even learned to like green, yellow, and orange foods.

You know, I still have that red lifesaver and when storm clouds gather and the darkness haunts me by turning my thoughts back to another time, I reach into my desk drawer, look at it, and, once again, taste the sweet nectar of forgiveness.

Acceptance

The night I met you, I was stranded outside.

Cold air,
Icy rain,

It beat me down profusely.
But then I met you.

Could it be,

Possibly that you were my missing link?

Yet I still see and feel my past,

I still feel the fierceness of that cold air,
Sometimes the icy rain.

When I look into your eyes, they guide me into
A place of warmth.

When the red carpet rolls from your eyes to mine,
My soul plants its eyes into nothing man has ever seen before.

This is *your* heart,

Now close to mine.

It's a true love,

It's not yours,

And no, it's not mine.
Thank you for that night, when I was stranded outside.
Now, Today, Forever,
I will always abide.

Untouched Places

She waltzes along with her bare feet
Through the untouched places of his heart.
He can even hear the tickle,
Of her whispering their love song.

The song echoes from his ear to his heart.
Her lips continue to lisp,
And the tickles continue to flow,

And the delicate romance continues
As she plants down her bare feet,
Into the untouched places of his heart.

The First Day

Here is the day they had been dreading for some time now, a morning that dawns white and impossibly beautiful, as if the weather is betraying the way they feel.

Julia goes about the business of a new day, packing lunches and brewing a pot of coffee while Paul, makes pancakes. They never have breakfast, usually just a muffin eaten in the car on the way to work, but the way he works at the stove would lead anyone else to think he does this every morning of his life. Julia watches him for a long moment, studying the sadness held in his shoulders, the determination with which he holds the spatula over the bubbling pancakes, the trance-like way he moves to get out the syrup and butter. They do not speak and everything is announced in their silence, a solid thing that crowds the kitchen along with the smells of breakfast and coffee and the freshly sharpened pencils that lie on the counter, threatening to roll off at any minute.

It is this aroma of pencils—a tanginess pervading the air so fragrantly that it causes her mouth to water—which causes her grief to swell the largest. The pencils smell like childhood and school and this realization causes her to have to do something besides just wait until it's time.

The coffee has finished dripping through, so she pours a cup into her ceramic mug—the same one she uses every morning—and goes out onto the porch to listen to the birds of morning and watch the day come in properly, each leaf glowing as if lit from behind. The sounds of traffic increase, car by car. The gear-stripping groans of a school bus coming down the hill fill her with such a sense of loss that her stomach knots and for the first time she feels a real, visceral reaction to the morning she has been fighting against for months now.

She feels stupid, to be so upset. She had lain awake for more than an hour after going to bed last night, turning over all the worst scenarios in her mind. And now, she feels washed out and incredibly full at the same time, as if her body does not know which way to go. She has not cried yet, but knows that she will.

She won't be able to let anyone see her.

Julia wonders if her own parents were as torn up as she and Paul. She doesn't remember them being upset at all. Happy, even, maybe. And although Julia knows that this is all a good thing, that moving on and growing up are both necessary and essential, she still has not convinced herself to let go. She doesn't want her little girl to start school.

Julia knows that once Nell goes to Kindergarten she will begin the process of leaving childhood behind. Everyone has been telling her this for a year now: There is a change that comes over a child once they go to school, a flicker of innocence gone the first time they are left alone with thirty others who are just like them but nothing like them at all. She knows that one day Nell will come in from school and be completely changed and she is hesitant to believe she will be able to recognize her own daughter. She puts her hand over her eyes, unable to accept this fact.

She had always sworn that she would never let her children become her whole life. She had rallied against the thought of letting motherhood define her. But here she is, not worried about the cases that await her on the docket once she gets to work, unconcerned about going out with her friends this weekend, unable to even pick up a book and read it because her mind is so crowded with the face of her little girl. For the first time she sees that it's impossible to not let your child take over your entire life, to not become completely selfless when you are blessed with someone who depends completely on you. Right now, in this moment, all that matters to her is her daughter's happiness. And Julia realizes that she has felt this way ever since the day Nell was born, although she has been on constant alert, trying to not let this secret reveal itself to her. And even more than that, she sees that she is glad for this feeling, thankful to be able to give herself completely to someone else.

The door creaks open and Paul comes out in his sock-feet, his own mug of coffee in hand. His face looks so clean, as if the grief they both share has wiped all his imperfections away.

"It's time we got her up," he says, and leans against the door-facing. Julia sighs heavily, doesn't want to move, but she rises and goes in to get Nell ready for school.

Glancing Across

It must be a good book.
Her eyebrows lift and a smirk
comes over her face from time to time.
She lightly scratches the back of her neck
as if deep in thought, lost in the pages,
she adjusts the corner of her glasses.

I sip my coffee over yesterday's newspaper,
but from where I sit I can't quite see
the title of what she's reading.
Is it a mystery, a suspense,
could I be her protagonist?
Smuggle secret files to our rendevous,
defying danger, steal a kiss.

She's looking up,
how long I can't tell.
I dart my eyes quickly
to my cup and wonder
if she noticed me.
With a slight smile
I blow casually into
my cold coffee and take a sip.

Martha White

The first time you saw me
without my dungarees
was down by the creek.
You were wildcrafting
and I was skinny-dipping,
washing bales of hay dust
from behind my ears.
In your arms you held
a basket of Yellowroot,
which you dropped
in teary-eyed laughter
at the sight of my backside.
When you told me I was
as white as two buttermilk biscuits,
I drew close my arms,
bronzed from the elbow down,
concealing what pale skin I could
that almost glowed in the clear water.

I couldn't count the times when
my grandmother said the same thing
during childhood baths.
I sat in the wash tub, embarrassed,
with a sponge and a bar of lye soap,
watching the water turn cloudy
while she always made sure
I cleaned behind my ears,
standing above me in her gingham dress.

But you hung yours
on a rhododendron limb
along with your bloomers
and, with a cannonball splash,

jumped into the swimming hole beside me,
making sure to soak my clothes
on the opposite bank.
I smiled astonishingly,
wondering
what rock
you had been sunning yourself on
for *your* back to be so tan,
so unbroken by modesty,
and remembered how Grandma
never cared much
for buttermilk biscuits.

No Regret

When life gets easier
and the corners of my mind
stop spinning from frustration,
I will shine like city lights
off in the distance
of a desert night.

I will laugh with my head back
so my white teeth show
the color in my cheeks.

When life is less bitter
and the hobgoblins of little minds
fade into the background static,
I will ring like wedding bells
on a pristine afternoon
with a tone clear and warm.

Everyone is holding hands
and the air is swirling
with apple blossoms and honey bees.

When everything is going right
and the black clouds of despair
are brushed away like dusty cobwebs,

will you run with me
down highway 64
to the county line, and beyond,
peel the past from our foreheads,
let the wind catch our innocence,
and listen to the steel belts play
a back-beat rhythm
to a traveling tune?

When it is all over,
and the pain no longer covers
my eyes with a jaded veil,

I will cast my bitterness
into the fiery furnace
and ride the sooty smoke
like a drunken Phoenix
into the topaz-blue sky.

And as I look down
at my pallid reflection
will I say, without doubt
that I had a good life?

Unfaithful: To Be or Not To Be

I see you as you stare
In your gory state of dishevel.
Death with all its finalness,
In your eyes that mock me with blame.
There within them is also the shock that
What you thought was a lamb
Is an adder with all its incongruous ability
To strike and leave its deadly poison within
The veins that I had loved so long.
You caused the chaos of an eternal hell
Within the bonds of my mind.
Now my dear, I watch as yours and her blood mingle.
As the initial shock, at what I have done wears off,
I begin to think of measures
In which to undo part, if not all of the damage
That I have done to you and she.
I have long dreamed of this day, my darling.
I have been chagrined at the thought
Of you in her arms.
But my wary heart suspicioned, but
Would not believe that before my eyes
Till now and – I see you now.

When the Sleeping Lion Wakens

He was beautiful. His icy blue eyes pierced her in a deep place that she had never touched. His shaggy blond hair swept just above his right eye, and she longed to run her fingers through it. His neglect to shave that morning was barely visible by the short, blond stubble shadowing along his jaw. Her heart was racing as he drew closer, and she felt her every muscle tighten. She pressed her lips together, looked down at her sweater, and then drew her eyes back up just in time to catch his cockeyed grin. She bashfully returned the smile, as the world spun wildly by.

She was perfect. Her sun kissed blond hair was cut into a long bob. Her hazel eyes were a mysterious mixture of green and brown, highlighted by her youthful innocence. She made him crazy wanting her the way he did. She carried her boyish athleticism with unmatched grace and class. Her modesty made her wildly sexy and chimerical. He felt a sting of pain each time he saw her, but it was pain he wished to always feel. And there she was. As he passed her, he smiled awkwardly, desperately wanting to whisper something sweet into her ear. She smiled back at him and he walked coolly on, without a word.

She felt cursed to live out her life never being loved by a man the way she had always dreamed. She often dreamt of him at night, stroking her face, her shoulders, caressing down her arms, loving every part of her. She stared into his eyes, letting the blue penetrate her soul, letting him fill her soul. She brought her hands up his chest, pressing firmly, watching them glide up and onto his face where she drew gently around his lips. She let him pour into her, but it was only a dream. And when she woke she couldn't feel the warmth of his breath, or see the blue of his eyes. And so she went on fearing the night.

He thought no woman would ever take him the way he had dreamed. He thought of her mostly, when the night crowded in around him. He thought of her naked figure, of tracing his hands along her hips, and holding her tight against him. He pictured her small, perfectly round breasts. He could imagine how it

would feel to have her in the night, but imagine was all he could do, because the lonely darkness was everywhere around him.

She wanted him to be her first love, the kind she had dreamt of so often. To have him whenever she wanted. To run her fingers through his hair was all she really wanted. There was something so different in the way she felt about him. She loved him, but more than that, she lusted for him too. She wanted him like she had never wanted anything before.

His polo shirt was pale yellow and wrinkled. She saw him coming towards her. The flush filled her cheeks like a glass filling with wine. Closer, closer he came, until he was next to her. He was stopped, and standing next to her. He was so close she could smell him, and she became intoxicated with his scent. He smiled confidently and, without even saying hello, asked if he could walk with her.

She simply nodded praying her excitement wouldn't rush out and blur her words.

The two of them walked, she thinking of the pounding of her heart and he drawing courage for each next step. There was no one around them, or so it seemed that the world was void of breath or life beyond their own.

She had never been perfect until two icy blue eyes saw her on a bench last fall. And he had never been beautiful until her hazel eyes watched him playing baseball in the grass. They were walking and the world was spinning, only it was standing still. They walked together, without a word. But none was needed until they reached the door.

They spoke for a moment, both remembering a time when they had previously met. He paused, taking in a deep breath. The air around them hung like a silent curtain shielding them from the world, until somehow he mustered courage enough to ask her for a date. She restrained her delighted relief and answered with a deceitfully confident, yes. Everything inside of him wanted to burst with excitement, and it seemed to radiate through his charming smile. Her body shuddered with elation, and her heart was pounding in her throat.

The two bodies hesitantly parted, but their thoughts remained on one another.

She was entranced by his confidence, his coolness. He made her feel safe. She made him feel confident. Her natural beauty, her hips, her back, her neck, her lips, all of it hypnotized

him. She made him excited and stirred vitality back into his stagnant life.

No time, it seemed, had passed before the inevitable became reality, and so they were a couple, she with her blond bob and he with his blond shag. They walked holding hands, never far from one another in thought or body. She loved him and saw it looking back at her with his blue eyes.

The lust lay beneath though, remaining perilously suppressed by the fervor and emotion of their new bond. It was like a sleeping lion, too dangerous to even think of for the mere risk of it awakening at the sound of your thoughts.

She had been fearful of the dark, of the dreams she had in the dark. But when she was with him she didn't need the dreams, and she even began to welcome the dark. He had never liked the night, or the emptiness he felt at night. But with her the emptiness had gone away, and he began to love the night.

Together in the mask of the night they walked as always, hand in hand, casting no shadows because of the nebulous night. Far off in the endlessly deep darkness a rumble started low, like a lion awakening. But then it was gone.

He picked up her hand he was holding and kissed it gently, as he sometimes did. They smiled with affection, walking further into obscurity. Further and further they walked, thinking about each other, not speaking a word. The street they walked was empty, and a single lamp on the corner lit their path. At the corner she looked up, realizing for the first time where they were. He looked at her softly, and they walked to the door. He unlocked the door and pushed it open, letting a flood of darkness spill out onto the street. The lone lamp shone dimly into the apartment, but then it was gone as the door clicked behind them.

The darkness was everywhere, with no lamp to lighten the room, but she was not scared and he was not empty. Outside the lion rumbled once more, a bit louder, but still away in the darkness.

He put his hand on her cheek, stroking her face without seeing, and then he leaned in and kissed her gently just once. But she wanted more, and she pressed her lips hard against his. He reached his hand behind her head, and they stood with their lips together, not wanting to breathe. They pulled back, startled by the passions aroused. He took her hand as they had walked before, and he led her in the darkness to his room. They stood motionless

for a moment, their eyes beginning to sketch the outlines of their bodies.

He leaned his head closer to her, and he kissed her neck. She closed her eyes and felt herself falling further into the darkness. Again and again he kissed her neck, until he was upon her lips once more. The feeling was maddening, and she trembled each time he touched her. She didn't feel him unbutton her shirt. She couldn't feel it slip off her shoulders. All she could feel was the rushing tingle exploding everywhere within her.

Her shoulders were round and smooth, and glowed, seemingly, even in the darkness. There she stood before him, with her eyes closed and her shirt off. He saw her as he had never seen her before. The face of the woman before him held an expression he had never seen—it was the look of unbridled desire. She wanted him and he could see it. He wanted her, but he was slow, and took her in so as not to forget her.

Outside the clouds continued to pile, and the lion's rumble grew louder, came closer. But they weren't scared, or alone. She opened her eyes, and he was staring at her, she knew. A fire was burning in those hazel eyes, and the heat went straight through him. She tugged at his shirt until it loosened from his pants, and then she pulled it over his head.

He couldn't withstand her any longer and he pushed her, with his body, to his bed. He worked quickly, and she heard his belt buckle hit the floor. She could see him more clearly now, but he was just out of her reach, fidgeting in the dark, but then he was there, almost on top of her. He gently pressed her shoulder until it was flat on the bed.

Her breath was fast, and her chest was heaving with frightful expectancy. He never fumbled as her pants fell next to his on the floor. She lay on his bed, naked, wanting him so badly, as never before. The passion she had always suppressed had surfaced, and she arched her back wanting him to come to her. She loved him, but now she lusted for him.

He stared at her in the pleasant darkness, which no longer seemed to be so lonely or so dark. She was perfectly lovely. He took her in. The lion was at the door roaring and the bed began to tremble. The earth gave way beneath them, and together they were falling. Through the darkness they were falling, but they were not alone, and they were not afraid.

He was upon her so fast and his body was so heavy, the

ecstasy drained from her eyes. She wanted to scream out in tormented delight, but her lips were still. He never kissed her, never thought to. He could only think of the release he felt. The incredible rush as his body came down upon her. He had seen the desire in her face as he had kissed her neck, and he knew she wanted him. Even now he could feel the energy surging through her body. He could feel heat building within her, and his lust for her deepened.

Rain began to pour down outside in fat, heavy raindrops, she could hear them falling. The world was spinning again. The world was no longer theirs alone. She could feel the hot breath of the lion, as his roar sent a terrible shiver through her body. Her lust for him was gone, and as she searched in his eyes for love it was nowhere to be found. She wanted to call out to it, but she knew it had never been.

He looked into her eyes as he lay next to her, and he no longer saw her beauty or her youthful innocence. She was like a flower, stripped of its petals by a gust of wind. And, as she looked into those icy blue eyes, she saw the cold distance for the first time. He leaned over and kissed her on the forehead. She smiled sweetly back at him.

Inside the darkness spread and she shook in fear, while he lay next to her feeling the loneliness take him over.

Outside the lion was sleeping.

Paralyzed

Is it crazy for me to have feelings for you today?
Do I hide what I know inside?
Wear a front, masked in hope, and continue to pray.

Phone ring, press ignore, I'll communicate to the beep
My voice is smiling but very undertone
Effort is futile, pause and swallow deep.

Maybe, I need to contain my emotions spilling on the floor
To be pursued is something easy
But you keep knocking over what I pour.

If I give you the world would you hold my hand?
Hold on gently till next year
But let go long enough to play again.

What is it you're running around looking to find?
Are you scared of what you have here?
Testing the water, but I haunt the back of your mind.

Should I dismiss thoughts of you and I together?
Put them aside for another time
Open them up to wear as protection during cold weather.

In through my eyes, into my chest, lies my heart for you to see
How paralyzed I am inside
When I am without you and it is just me.

Consumed

Feelings fly like minutes on a broken clock--
too long a glance; our eyes dart from familiar to memorized.
Attempts at sanity are wasted, lost to me as
flowers for the dead. Passionate misgivings received. I give more,
more, more—
all that remains is a song to pass the time.
Careful memories strike hard chords on sleepy dreamers'
instruments. Poisoned words of a life, screaming for peace,
echo in the dying night. Placid eyes of fear watch the saints for
miracle signs,
trembling hands clasped in a rushed prayer tick off the Rosary
again and again.
Calling to God for sobriety of mind—I am drunk with thoughts of
you.

Suicide Again

Frothy, cherry, liquid, sliding down my throat;
dribbles from spoon to tongue. Blood red
resemblance of cuts made day before last.
Deeper than the pain, ceaseless agony, endless
terror, haunted footsteps taken in the black mid-
night. Deeper still—the ease which life transitions
to life-less. Deeper the sleep. Deeper, deeper go
the needles. Scarlet, dripping from my fingers;
pools of raspberry worries float off in the bathwater.
Laughter down the hallways, screams of delight drift in
from the corridors into the somber, seedy hotel room.

Pawey

Spinning. Spinning. Spinning. We would spin around in his old, worn out brown recliner that felt like a big tub of feathers when I sat in it. We would spin until the room would spin, even when we stopped. We would laugh and watch the room go past our eyes. His name could have been Grandpa or Grandfather, but my brother chose to call him Pawey and I followed in his decision. Pawey died when I was in third grade. I do not reflect as much on how I felt during his funeral or how sad I am now that he has been physically gone for twelve years. I do not drudge over the past as much because I know that his spirit is still connected with me. When I think of Pawey, all of my senses start churning. I can see him, hear him, feel him, smell him, and even taste things associated with him. He was and always will be my Pawey, because I have so many incredible memories of the times I spent with him.

I loved to hear Pawey tell stories in his deep, mountain dialect. His voice, gruff and loud, resounded throughout the countryside as he worked diligently in his garden and house, telling stories with me sitting on his knee. As we would spin in the recliner, Pawey would tell me to pick my feet up when we went by the yellow brick hearth to make sure that I did not knock his “spit” cup over or our two glasses of mau mau (Mountain Dew). We enjoyed the simple things in life, like going into the kitchen and pouring us a nice, cold glass of mau mau. It was our favorite drink; we would place our glasses on the hearth beside Pawey’s “spit cup”, which he always had close by. A mason jar comes in handy for many things, but for my Pawey, it held tobacco juice, a substance that I would snarl my nose at whenever he jokingly asked me if I wanted any. He chewed tobacco constantly and did it with such intensity that it looked like he was exercising his huge jaws. He would gather a “wad” and stuff it in his cheek, very carefully. I loved to watch him chew tobacco and spit. I would try to imitate him with a wad of bubblegum, but I could never perfect the act of chewing and talking at the same time the

way Pawey could. It was like tobacco was an intricate part of him. I loved the sweet smell of the tobacco on his hands as he would rock and spin me in his recliner.

We would spin around and then he would tell me to go stand under the mantle so that he could measure me. Until the day he died, Pawey measured my height at the hearth. I will never forget the day that I could not stand on the hearth anymore because my head would not fit under the mantle. Pawey announced in his loud, bustling voice that I could be moved onto the floor to be measured, I was so tall. He would make me place my feet against the bricks and would mark my height with a pencil. As my scuffed Keds aligned themselves with the bricks, I closed my eyes to imagine that I was taller than the mantle. I knew, though, that Pawey did not care how tall I was, because no matter my height, I could still occupy his lap. I would jump back on his lap and we would spin again.

Oh, he was a huge man. When I sat on his knees I felt as if I was sitting on the thick branch of a huge redwood tree. His mass, his bulk, could fill my tiny arms, as I would wrap around him like I was hugging a giant beach ball. He always made me feel so safe and secure as he would hold me with his strong, big hands. When my mama went back to Gardner-Webb to get her teaching licensure and Daddy and Mama Lou (my grandma) were working third shift, Pawey would take care of my sister and me. Although he was a “man’s man,” he did not mind taking on the responsibility of a house wife. I will never forget his big hands bouncing his bed with my newborn sister lying on top of it; that was the only way we could get her to sleep. I would watch his strong hands work to try to get my sister to sleep. As my sister was almost doing somersaults in the air, I liked looking at his one finger that did not have a fingernail. It fascinated me because all of my fingers were equipped with nails. He did so many crafty and skilled jobs with his hands. One could see his workmanship through his brown, leather-like skin covering the thick muscles and fingers of his hands.

Pawey would never let anything stand in his way of working. He worked outside and around the house. I could hear Pawey coming down the dark carpeted hall and as he stepped into the kitchen, the dishes greeted him with rattling brought by his heavy steps. He would fire up the stove and would start cooking. He would fix meals when Moma Lou was at work. We could hear

him in the kitchen making slaw and homemade French fries and melt-in-your-mouth hamburgers. His food tasted so good. I did not pay attention to the mounds of butter and Crisco that he added to the food. All I thought was how well my Pawey could cook.

After the dishes were cleared away, he would walk over to the sink and start running the dishwater. I would drag the kitchen chair over to the sink, climb on top, and watch the bubbles cascade over the dirty dishes. Pawey taught me how to wash dishes in detail. He would tell me to grasp the forks and spoons between my small fingers enclosed in the rag. He would then show me how to rub them back and forth over the metal to get all of the dirt and germs off. He would then hand me a glass, and I would show him what he had already taught me and swipe the rage over the rim of the glass until I could hear it squeak with cleanliness. Pawey wanted everything done right and with accuracy. So I would not have any harmful chemicals in my system, Pawey would always make me wash my apples and then take a dishtowel and scrub them until they were dry. That way all of the wax would come off and I could taste the true sweetness of the apple. Pawey taught me how to make things work for myself. If something broke, he taught me how to fix it. If I did not like the way something tasted, I would not just throw it away. I would add to it extra salt or pepper. Pawey taught me to deal with what I had. An apple will turn out pretty if I just worked hard enough to get all of the nasty stuff off. This goes along with his philosophy of life. Everything will work out; it just takes a little bit of work and determination.

Pawey was an intelligent man. I could see his concentration in his facial features. His eyes were so big and deep they could each hold a gallon of water. His thick eyebrows hovered over his eyelids when he would wrinkle his forehead. Then, out would come my favorite action of his face. His bottom teeth would stick out over his top lip like a bulldog. Some might have thought that he looked scary when he did it, but I knew that he did not only do it when he was angry. He would do it when he would concentrate on something or when I would ask him to. I tried to copy him, but only Pawey could make that face. We would spin around in his chair again, and sometimes he would stop in front of the television so that he could watch his favorite show, "Guiding Light." I always found it amusing that my great

big Pawey loved a soap opera so much. His weakness did not show for long, though, when he would point out his favorite character, the headstrong Reva. I learned to love Reva's ferocity too and I would imagine myself as her as I wiped the mau mau off my top lip.

Spinning again, we would glance out of the window, which was sunny and dominant behind the chair. Looking outside made us want to go and sit amongst the oak trees. The yard smelled of mulch and tobacco. Pawey and I would sit on the front porch and wave at cars. Many people would beep as they passed because they knew and loved my Pawey. I would talk about the cars I liked. It did not take long for Pawey to discover my heart's passion; Volkswagen Beetles, especially red ones. He promised me that on my sixteenth birthday he would buy me a "candy-apple red beetle." Of course, he did not live to do so, but such an outstanding promise still reminds me of what a great grandpa I had.

I would jump off of the chair and run out into the driveway. I would ask him to turn his radio on in his big, yellow truck. I would dance all over the concrete driveway, just making sure not to get too close to the road. Pawey would tell me not to cross the big crack in the driveway because that was as far as I needed to wander. I would dance, and Pawey would laugh and clap his big hands. His favorite dance was my interpretation of Garth Brooks' "Friends in Low Places." His belly would shake and his mouth would produce so much laughter as he watched me act like I was drowning in a tub of whiskey. It was a proud moment for us anyway.

He liked watching me play on his neighbor's swing set while he whittled on his wood. He would make the neatest, most detailed objects with his huge hands. Birds and small cars would be produced in an instant. As he whittled, he loved watching me act like Mary Lou Retton on the bars of the swing set. On day, I was coming off of the bar and I fell and hit an uncovered screw. It ripped my shirt and made a deep cut in my back. I ran to Mama Lou and Pawey crying. They sat me down in the dinning room chair and Pawey rushed out the door to buy some Hydrogen Peroxide. He came back with the brown bottle of bubbles and as Mama Lou was about to pour the cold liquid over my cut he handed me a grape Push-Pop. He said, "Just suck on this lollipop and everything will be O.K. You won't even feel it." Pawey was

right. I could not feel the pain just because he gave me that sticky push top. I let my taste buds capture my gooey grape sweetness. A few weeks later, my parents and I were coming home from revival late at night and there sat my Pawey, putting together a swing set just for me. He was smiling from ear to ear as I ran over and played on the slide in the moonlight. He even included the rubber grips that fit over the screws so that I would not get hurt again. I still have that swing set in my backyard, although it is falling apart. The pieces of rubber still cover the screws, which remind me of Pawey's protection over me.

He was my friend. We would laugh at the same things and get mad at the same things. I always knew that he loved me, but he wanted me to know it. One of my last memories of him was when he called me upon his lap in his big recliner and told me that I was his "favorite granddaughter; well, you and your sister." The rooms stopped spinning. I looked at him and he smiled at me. I loved him too. He knew that I did because I told him every time I saw him and he could also feel it through my squeezes in my arms around his belly. Yep, my Pawey is still with me. When I wash a fork I still feel his hand helping me get in between the crevices. And when I bite into a freshly washed apple, I know that Pawey helped me get all of the wax off so that I could taste the sweetness that he wanted me to enjoy. Pawey will always watch over me and I know that when I go to Heaven one day, he will be ready to take me on a spin in our "candy-apple red beetle."

Maritime Forest

I know a perfect place for homicide
for cyanide, for suicide

after 15,840 footsteps all the way to the spit
of sand and half-way back again.

again and again and again

The low country dead oaks and pines and palms
stand there under siege, unable to move,

stuck to the quickly slipping away sand.
Eyes sink in and burst out again.

again and again and again

I know a perfect place for a lifetime's
metaphor – the pounding surf and

sunned-gray wood and collapsed and dead live oaks,
dwindling to nothing and eroded,

again and again and again,

a lifeless, bleached-out, nuclear-fall-out
forest against a silver sky.

Relentless ocean, pounding surf, stark trees –
a world of repetitious death.

again and again and again

Rip-rap is available, rocks for jetties
and groins, one way to catch the sand,

one way to save the trees, an eternal
metaphor: one Way to save me.

Liverpool Miles of Indigo Abandonment

guilty skies of gray, black, and indigo,
makes a parody of his emotions
by portraying the neglect of them all,
and also with the gall,
to rape his virgin catalogue of feelings,
with its piercing advances,
innocently,
shapes his abandonment,

the house of this chameleon-like sky,
now has a new champagne suede ceiling,
of which he fancies,
this overcast reimburses his deposit of courtship,
of whom he later withdrew from his woman with angelic strides,
now he owes her to even out their balance,

recorded expressions,
permits him to tape over them with premature ones,
that now modify his preface.
with a swagger in his step,
he struts down the avenue,
subconsciously engaged to all surroundings,
he elopes with the coalition of everyday sights.
an older woman,
possibly in her mid to late 70's,
wearing a purple shawl, red mock-neck, flannel pants,
and her tote shoes of experience and turmoil,
wails away on her aging cello,
that says "hello" to his secluded heart,
he feels he's obliged to bleed any anecdote upon her,
one that will likely transport him into her realm — maybe he's
already there though,
because he is now bestowed with seeing people walk by with
their noses up not making

any eye contact with this woman,
but he stays,
and detects her crafty wardrobe,
and realizes now how it matches.
Within the confines of his knee-high black boots,
The pain to his feet is frank,
and holds nothing back in letting him know,
this alone though will not pose a threat to him,
as he is now shackled in elation.
facing a vista that is genuine in all aspects,
he passes,
newly painted structures,
that cradles the smell of turpentine,
doors of mahogany, oak, and pine,
intoxicates his mind with their odor,
but his degree of perception is not altered.
his andante steps are a tangent in this course,
a force,
that directs him to a cart of apples — red and green in color,
loitering by this sanctuary of fruit,
he notices something is amiss,
all of the ripe ones are gone,
and the placard reads, "All Apples 15 cent per lb.",
seeing what he sees,
he doubts even the rotten ones are less in stature,
how sour of the consumers,
the visage of the sky now is a bridge between sorrow
and grief.
as he saunters down the street,
he's conquered,
the documents of these poignant events,
unknowingly,
the smell of freshly brewed coffee stops him right in his tracks-
the mere mechanics of
this sense still bewilders him,
at that moment,
she appears-his woman,
dressed in a lavish full length dark grey coat with black boots on,
he cannot make out what shade of shirt she has on,
but with her coat fastening three buttons down,
he notices a necklace with an indigo pearl,

his regiment of emotions file up,
and dock at the tip of tongue,
for forgiveness he is ready to hurl,
but that quick,
the prelude to his apology vanished,
as if she was auctioned off to the wind,
gone,
and lingering — which slices his soul like a rapier.

he puts it all together now,
the trilogies were the most profound,
gray, black, and indigo and the sky changing three times,
but the colors that came in a pair,
red and green,
to that he was blind,
not noticing the couple- he was the sour consumer,
who mocked his emotions,
guilty, from the start,
diluted in potent potion.
Abandoned.

JASON BRUNER



Her Face
14" x 20"

JASON ELMORE



Studio
14" x 18"

ERIK WINCE



self-portrait
24" x 8"

EMILY DAVIS / LEEANNA WOODWORTH



*Emily Davis
Berries
12" x 8"*



*Leeanna Woodworth
Feet
12" x 19"*



Spirituality
7" x 16.5"

JOEL FLUTY



Horse
5" x 7"

LEE ADAMS



Night at the Fair
5" x 7.5"



Ruddy Turnstone
3" x 10.5"

New Orleans Summer Nights of the 1920's

the jazzy sounds wailing in front of stores,
defines the streets with a mood so assured,
that caress the lovers who clutch each others hands,
in such a way they even can't understand,
the trees,
merely reflecting the evening's breeze,
and everything seems to be jake,
which leaves all hearts at ease,
zoot-suit entourages,
are applauded for their costumes,
as soon as they enter a room ensemble the view shifts to their
ensembles,
games are played and matched,
all done, by dainty dames and menacing macs,
the flames of the night constitute for your cigar's match,
the soul of Louisiana,
synchronized, to harsh and appealing,
with all of the sweet and deceitful eyes,
how can one marshal a feeling,
street corner symphonies,
contain trombones and baritones,
giving you more when it starts to pour,
as if the rain was unknown,
Capone thoughts are postponed,
once you shift to the dance,
it's as if you are lifted to a trance to enhance your gift to a prance,
and if they are any schisms,
they are broken by the rhythm,
which comes unbiased – and minus a sigh of tension,
as some head to their French Quarters,
walking, and keys to Model T's,
they will indeed be looking forward,
to more of the Big Easy.

Soon

Secluded lanoleum skies like the sorrow-shaped lies;
While wondering why so weary are the ways of this one waning
world.

Behind timely testimonies will birth both the truth, and buried
books that teach tormented
thoughts to a bigot's bride;
Performing pleasures that peel off pessimistic pales which paint
this picture-parting portrait.

Quiet acts quite actually inspires questions to be asked;
Such as: Should sound sleep soundly so I can slide sound asleep?
Crippled dreams crawl from cracked desires, now caroling a
damned chorus;
Giving grieving gifts that only go to the grateful, the ones that
have lost their gamble to the glaze of gone.

Reaping the ramifications that never vanish on this vain road, via
verified ruthlessness;
Forgetting how far we have flown from the forfeit of our fore
shadowed fate.
Murder and hypocrisy merely manufactures a muffled hope,
hiding all mechanics of a higher man;
Uprooting the uglies that undercut us.

Storing pain inside sanity
only balloons the unbeheaded bottle;
which borrows bargains and beings,
to prevent the sight of pity, passing soon.

Plague

The night has come
There on the barge lay many a bum
Terror stalks about
Gliding strong and stout
Mice and flea scamper
With lives they tamper
Pain and agony
One man cries, "This'll be the death of me."
Of the flesh biting and tearing
While none of the world caring
Scars and festered sores
It's a shame man opened the doors
All the filth and rotten food
Gave birth to the gruesome dude
Swift and quick
Death to all in just one lick
With no cure
The world is over, for sure
No animal or man
Will live at its han'

Accident

Ari squinted through the misty gray rain, following the faint beams of her pickup's headlights. The dark car in front of her swerved into the middle of the road then back into the right lane, narrowly missing an oncoming car.

"Fool, what are you doing?" the blond girl muttered. Her quick green eyes glanced at the speedometer for the thousandth time. Still ten miles under the speed limit.

"Come on, grammy; keep going."

Ari stared hard at the outlines of the people in the car ahead, realizing it was a grandma, most likely driving her husband home. The poor old lady could hardly keep her car in a straight line, much less mind the speed limit.

Tall and slim, Ari leaned back in her seat, trying to ease the tension in her shoulders. Driving in the rain stressed her out and so did this road, out in the middle of nowhere, flat prairie as far as the eye could see. The writer's conference awards ceremony had stretched out over three hours. And grandma didn't help any by going slowly and driving so erratically. Ari flipped on the radio and belted out the Neil Diamond tune. Lightning pulsed along the edges of the prairie, briefly silhouetting the occasional cactus.

She glanced at the clock as the songs changed. Ten minutes to eleven. If she could ditch grandma, she should be home by quarter after. Then a cappuccino, the book she'd been eyeing all week, and maybe a hot bath...

Loud screeching snapped her attention back to the car in front of her. Grandma had swerved into the middle of the road again and a car appeared without warning, fishtailing on the wet pavement in an attempt to avoid a head-on collision. Ari deftly veered her truck off the road and into the long grass. Behind her, the sound of twisting, grating metal sliced through the ever-thickening veil of rain that cloaked the dismal night.

Ari leapt out of the pickup and briefly surveyed the damage. The cars, roughly the same size, had swerved trying to avoid each other and ended up in a head-on.

The car on the right was her mother's.

Ari shook the rain out of her eyes, confused; an ache was gnawing at her stomach. The cars looked like two dogs, fighting to the death, teeth locked, muzzles wrinkled back, growling.

Steam hissed out of the mess, glass tinkled to the pavement, mixing with the rain to create a horrible accompaniment. Bile rose in her throat as she became aware that she was the only one on the scene. Again.

She remembered the radio her dad had installed in the truck after her mother's accident two years ago. She raced back, blond hair beginning to drip with rain.

"Hello, can anyone hear me?!"

Static.

"Hello, I need help! It's an emergency!"

More static. A voice came through then, garbled, but a voice none the less.

"What? I can't understand you!"

"Where are you?"

"I'm in the middle of Flats Road. At the, uh..." Ari squinted through the thickening rain. "At the 47 mile marker."

"Ok, just hang on, I'm sending an ambulance. What happened?"

"There was a head-on collision of an older lady and her husband and some other car and I think they're all dead, but I don't know and—"

"Wait a minute." The voice interrupted firmly. "Take a deep breath. Ok, can you see the wreck?"

"Yeah..."

"Is there any fire or smoke?"

"Oh, yeah, I see it now. There's lotsa smoke coming out of one of the cars!" As she watched, flames erupted from the car on the right. "Momma!"

"Ok, just hang in there, help is on the way..."

Ari suddenly remembered her summer life-guarding course.

"I know CPR and first aid," she told the man on the radio. "I have to go help them. Please pray!" she added. It seemed God had stopped listening to her. She'd forgotten how to pray, anyway.

As she dropped the mike on the worn leather seat, her father's voice whispered in her ear.

"Don't hang up, just leave the line open and do what needs to be done." She obeyed him and raced to the cars, shoes slapping on

the slippery cement.

Cautiously approaching the driver's side of the grandma's car, Ari grasped the crumpled door and pried it open. It swung free of the car and the sight of the old lady's body, or what was left of it, made her sick. Wiping her mouth on her sleeve, Ari straightened and walked slowly towards the second car, her stomach writhing.

The driver's door was jammed and Ari yanked desperately at it. "Help me! Someone, please!"

The metal creaked and groaned, refusing to give. Ari pounded her fists on the window, furious and hysterical.

"Momma! Hold on!"

She ran to the passenger side and flung open the undamaged door. Lunging across the seats, Ari grabbed her mother's limp wrist from the steering wheel. No pulse.

The man and woman in the front were both dead. His head hung limply and hers was hidden in the steering wheel. Rain pattered into the car, dripping into solemn puddles on the dashboard. Ari stumbled backward and threw up again.

Gasping for breath, she opened the back door and stared at the baby carrier. Her chest constricted.

Gingerly pulling it out, she fought back the urge to cry. Shaking hands unstrapped the little boy and cradled him to her chest. As she searched for vital signs, a moan escaped her throat and hot tears coursed down her cheeks.

Gently replacing the tiny body, Ari dropped to her knees and cried out in anguish, tilting her face to the rain-swept heavens. Her clothes clung to her slender body, blond hair plastered to her head, hot tears mingling with cold rain drops on her smooth cheeks.

A bolt of lightning split the sky, illuminating each drop of rain as it pelted earthward. Thunder cracked in response, shaking her. The old man.

Ari jumped up and scrambled to the passenger side of the old lady's car. His door swung open easily. Carefully stabilizing his head in case of neck injuries, Ari unbuckled him and slowly lowered the frail body to the ground.

The faintest hint of a pulse throbbed in his neck, but he wasn't breathing. Ari took a calming breath and repeated the main points of CPR. "Open the airway. Check for breathing. Check for circulation." Tipping the man's head back, she pressed

his nose shut, opened his mouth, and gave him an artificial breath. Quickly, she found the sternum and pumped the air back out.

Tipping his head back, Ari repeated the first steps.

"No! I'm gonna get you out of here!"

Carefully, but in a panicked hurry, Ari pulled her mother from the crumpled car. Stretching the slender woman's still form out on the pavement, Ari gave two rescue breaths and checked her carotid artery for a pulse. Nothing.

"God! Oh, God!" she screamed, pumping furiously.
"Breathe!"

After a short time, her arms ached, her lungs burned, and there was nothing to show she was winning against death. Halfway through a chest compression, a thunderous siren pierced the curtain of rain that separated her from the world.

Sirens wailed from every direction. A tall, handsome man grabbed her arms and tried to pull her away.

"No! She's my mother!" Ari lunged for the still body again, desperation and terror giving her strength.

The paramedic caught her. "I know," he soothed. "I'll take good care of her."

Ari hesitated only momentarily, quickly remembering her duty to this man who lay deathly still before her. The siren grew in volume and soon ceased as she doggedly continued her task.

Faceless men in blue uniforms surrounded her. One pulled her to her feet and led her away from the old man while the other three took up where she left off.

Ari looked dazedly back over her shoulder as the paramedic led her away. A burly man was dropping a white sheet over her mother's face.

"No!" she screamed, her knees giving out and dropping her to the pavement.

The calm and control that had dictated her actions fled with the arrival of professionals. A violent sob tore from her chest, the tears pouring down her cheeks, the anguish of that night two years ago fresh and alive.

The young man that had pulled her from the body took one look at her face, ashen beneath her lifeguard's tan, and led her to the ambulance.

The woman in the ambulance took her temperature and scanned her for lacerations or broken bones. Ari sat tense, shivering, and unfeeling, waiting to wake up from her worst

nightmare.

"Miss, I need you to tell me what happened." A police officer stood in the open door, his face blank.

"My mother..." Ari's voice broke as she remembered and she struggled with the paramedic. "I couldn't save her!" she shrieked. "It's all my fault!"

"She's gonna need lots of counseling," the paramedic murmured to the police officer.

"No!"

When she realized where he was steering her, Ari resisted with all her might, crying out, digging her heels into the slippery pavement, agonizing memories of doctors' offices and psychology tests flooding her mind.

The EMT allowed her to sit and knelt beside her, holding her arm with one hand, the other holding her shoulder.

"Hey, it's OK, I won't put you in there, it's fine, just rest..." he soothed. Touching her chin, he forced her eyes to meet his. "My name's Kylar. What's your name?"

Ari's shoulders shook with restrained sobs. "Arianna," she whispered. "But everyone calls me Ari."

"Ok, Ari. Let's just sit here. I think I know you, Ari. Have we met before?"

Green eyes stared up at him, bewildered. "I... yes. My mother. Two years ago. She was killed..." Her voice broke.

"I remember. You were amazing." Kylar's voice calmed her. He sat beside her and wrapped an arm around her shoulders, seemingly oblivious to the rain and slick mud. "Tonight must have been so hard for you."

She inclined her head slightly. After a long pause, Ari looked Kylar in the face and spoke, her voice thick.

"I was driving home from a conference. I got stuck behind an old woman driving real slow. She kept swerving into the middle of the road and I was afraid she was going to get hit. But she kept missing the other cars.

"Then I turned on the radio and was singing. Neil Diamond. It was 10:50. I heard brakes screeching and I knew she got hit. I pulled off the road and got out to look. I remembered the radio Dad put in the truck for me after..." Her voice cracked and she closed her eyes, steeling herself for the details.

"The radio he put there after Mom died. And I called in and talked to someone. I described the wreck. I know CPR from

life-guarding, so I didn't hang up. I just set the radio down and came to help. No one came by here the whole time. It was just me.

"I went to the old lady first, but she was..." Her throat constricted, but she forced the words out. "...she was dead. So I went to the second car and they were dead, too. And I opened the back door and there was a... a..." Ari swallowed, unable to continue.

Kylar pulled her closer, rubbing her arms, up and down. "It was the baby, wasn't it?"

She stifled a sob, but her body shook uncontrollably. "There was nothing I could do!" she yelled, clenching her fists in his shirt. "I couldn't save them!"

Kylar pulled her into his arms, tears streaming down his handsome face. Dark curls hung limply in the pouring rain.

Ari clung to him. The muscled chest beneath his soaking shirt was firm as his arms tightened around her. She let the grief and anger drain her tears, feeling every rain drop like an accusing finger poking into her conscience.

After a long while, Ari straightened. Kylar's arms loosened, but never left her.

"I remembered the old man and started working on him. Then you guys found me. That's all." She shrugged a little, her eyes clouding over in the first sign of minor shock.

"Ari, I'm sorry. Especially after your mom and all. You were very clear-headed. Don't quit on me now. You need to stay strong." His voice was deep and slow, calming her, bringing her back.

A tall black man in an EMT uniform walked up, nodding to Kylar. He stooped and knelt next to Ari.

"Ma'am?" He paused.

She gave a weak, half-smile.

He returned her smile. "The old man's gonna make it. You saved him."

She sighed and sagged against Kylar, rain dripping off her chin.

The EMT left and Ari turned tearful green eyes to Kylar. "I want to go home, please."

He nodded and stood, a strong arm still around her waist, supporting her. Kylar settled her in the passenger seat of the truck, disappeared for a few minutes, then climbed in and brought

the truck to life.

Ari gave him brief instructions and turned away, staring vacantly out the window into the rainy haze of a gray and mournful dawn. Flashing lights shimmered in the rain, whipping through the side mirror. Red. Blue. White. Red. Ari squeezed her eyes shut, trying to erase any memory of the two awful movies replaying and overlapping in her mind.

Ari settled herself in the crook of Kylar's elbow and laid her head on his shoulder. The convulsive shaking eased and she was suddenly exhausted and cold.

Kylar pulled the truck into her driveway and shifted his weight to wake her. "We're here."

Ari looked around, confusion flitting across her features. Tears welled in her emerald eyes again.

Kylar came around the hood of the truck and walked her to the door. Ari stepped inside the dark house and hesitated, hand on the knob. Turning back, she caught Kylar's warm smile.

"Please don't leave me alone." Her eyes pleaded with him.

"I'll leave my phone number. You can call anytime you need to." He scribbled his number on a piece of paper from one of his uniform pockets and tucked it into her hand.

Stepping near, Ari gazed up into his face; a ghost of a smile graced her lips.

"Thank you," she whispered.

Kylar pulled her into his arms, pressing his lips to her temple. "I'm so sorry," he murmured into her hair. He released her after a moment and stepped back out the door.

"You can call anytime," he repeated. "It's a short drive. Good-night, Ari."

She watched him walk away, a slim blond, leaning in the doorway, arms wrapped tight around herself, fear and exhaustion haunting her green eyes.

The phone jangled him out of a light sleep. He glanced at the clock as he reached for the phone. 2:17.

"Ari?"

"I'm sorry, Kylar. I..." she choked on a sob. "I can't close my eyes without seeing... it."

The lean young man sat up, running a hand through tangled curls. "The first night's the hardest. Do you want me to come over?"

Silence seemed to stretch out forever.

“Yes,” she whispered finally.

He found her on her front steps fifteen minutes later, hugging her knees to her chest.

“Aren’t you freezing?”

Ari shook her head numbly, wiping at the tears that poured down her face. She had showered and tried to sleep, but the images kept forming a gruesome kaleidoscope behind her eyes.

“Stay put, OK?” Kylar came back from his Jeep with a quilt, two mugs, and a thermos. He tucked the quilt around her and sat down. Pouring two mugs of hot chocolate, he offered her one and took a scalding sip of his own.

“I don’t know what to do,” she whispered. “Do I owe them anything? What can I do for the old man? He lost his wife. I can’t figure it out.”

Kylar rubbed her back in slow circles as she began to cry again.

“Usually, the witnesses try to make contact with the families to tell them about the accident and help give them closure.” Ari looked up at him, eyes bright with old memories. “I remember now... What was her name?” She took a thoughtful sip out of the warm mug in her hands. “Lily. She was first on the scene of the accident and she went with me to the hospital. She called later and asked if she could tell Dad and me about her memories. She told me I was fearless...”

“You were,” Kylar agreed. “Then and tonight. I’m proud of you.”

“Kylar, can I call their families in the morning? I want to tell them.” She watched his face, watched as he thought the request over.

“Sure, Ari. We can get their numbers first thing. We can also get you into the hospital to see the old man if you’d like.”

“Thank you,” she murmured, resting her head wearily on his shoulder. Kylar stroked her hair and watched as she slowly drifted into sleep.

“You’re more than welcome, Ari. More than welcome,” he whispered as the first golden rays of sun touched her face and hair, transforming the brave, scared girl into a sleeping angel.

11 February 2003

I just want to go home
But I can't find it
No I'm not lost
Just homeless
Eggshells and dust of winter
Stare at me hollow-eyed
Dumb open cotton mouthed
Silence of dead trees
Dancing a forlorn dance
With the bitter wind
Only grasping grasping
For that memory of
Warm breath,
Steamy caresses
Enraptured embrace
Westward headed cold suns
Blind me as that futile
Dance blurs by
House after house of
Attics just waiting for
The layers to be peeled
Away as the paint fades
Harsh dull unvivid colors
Abuse the canvas of
The hills the glorious mountains
Chained by the icy grip
Of snow clouds, rain clouds
Drear.
Home is none of these houses,
None of these hills.

11/11/02, Looking Back on 5/23/89

I must apologize to you, Daddy,
For I have not visited your tombstone
Even after all the kisses
You slobbered on my baby cheeks during my first nine years
Only every now and then I shed tears
Surely you deserve more than a few drops of salty water

Then again you and I did love that salty water
Fishing swimming playing – all with Daddy
In the Atlantic Ocean of someone else's salt tears
Shells fragmented remnants – tombstone
To sea creature's death over millions of years
Now in a child's grasp, treasure like candy kisses.

I do miss the intimacy signified by those sloppy kisses
Caressing my infant face like warm sea water
So explain to me this passing of years
In which I have overcome mourning you Daddy.
Who, if not your daughter, dusts off the tombstone,
Shines & polishes your memory with tears?

At the mention of your death, people expect tears.
Your death explains (supposedly) why I seek men's kisses
But you have remained buried by that tombstone
You haven't arisen out of death's water
For me, you have been nothing like Plath's daddy
Although for psychology's sake, I needed you for more than nine
years.

But what about those daughters who have daddy for years
Whose life, rather than death, brings tears?
What about those who wince at mention Daddy
Those who scrubbed cheeks and wiped away kisses
Trying to cleanse themselves with scorching water,

Pain and hurt washed away only after finally placing the tombstone.

There's more value in memories than the cold tombstone
Whose specific inscription I've forgotten in recent years
I've survived your death, come up out of the water
Only sometimes do my eyes well with tears
(Rarely overflowing). Mom still may need those kisses
I've found I can live fully even without you Daddy.

I pass that tombstone, remember my tears
Back in those years, I still needed your kisses
Emerging from death's dark water, I'm driving by and moving on,
Daddy.

Clatter Chang, Batter Bang

clatter chang, batter bang,
rearrange the ribbons threaded through my mind
the fifty cent philosophies,
prodding me to lay aside my soul, pursue a societal-driven goal
letting go, to my own self destruction,
massive reconstruction on the perfect man that i once was
long before Eden--my God, my closest friend receding
far away, can't find my way--alone
i need some help, my flesh is falling
away like that dying brown crying kelp
swept out to sea, wish i could see your face again
lost among the waves, fighting to be brave,
it is your lost love i crave
crashing, my arms are thrashing, as i am smashing
into the shore, forgotten lore tells me a story
of your undying glory, that died so we could be unified
i stand now dignified, you kiss and dry the tears i've cried
i wonder why i bought the lie for so long
trading your blessing for messing around,
trading the boat to emote on a higher ground
but there is none around,
surrounded by the water, i drowned
and then your hand picking me out,
pushing your breath into my liquid lungs
restore my strength, once more your grace
reaches the length to give this lost embrace
my feet are set, the challenge has been met
no longer living the unforgiving world's lies
I have now realized, it is your eyes where i will find the prize
lifting me up, i accept your cup,
pour out the wine, pour out your blood
princes from swine, castles from mud
clatter chang, batter bang
the ribbons threaded through my mind

have found again that golden glory
of the once upon a time story
for which we each search, our hearts lurch
each time we trade truth for compromise
we were meant to rise
above the muddled muck of this messed up yuck
we call home for now,
somehow we've got to regain our focus
attain that center locus
from which we fell, denying hell
our selves,
princes from swine, castles from mud
pour out the wine, pour out your blood
lifting me up, i accept your cup,
my feet are set, the challenge has been met
no longer living the unforgiving world's lies
i have now realized, it is your eyes where i will find the prize

What If?

What if I grew up in a world where I was not afraid--a world which didn't teach me from birth that I was weaker and had to be ever watchful and careful, responsible for the dangers that might befall me if I wandered too far or dared to play in adventures too risky for a girl. What if childhood taught me that I could dare and, finding courage, be victorious instead of admonishing me to be careful of strangers, especially men, to never go anywhere alone, not to climb trees, and if I did to certainly not stretch above the lower boughs. What if I was able to get over the fears that encircled the growing child, prison bars clamped down "for my own good," but at shortened radi than the boys. Than the boys who could roam free through the forested countryside and back-yard trails, who climbed to the very tops of the oak trees and had undoubtedly fallen a few times but were none the worse from it after all, who did not shirk from the eyes of a boy--wondering if his thoughts were toward lusty or otherwise unwanted ends--and who found in the opposite sex no potential threat of a victimizing situation. Who romped in the rain and mud of spring and ran bare chested bare foot through the successive summers and successfully slipped out of the confining sweaters, hats, gloves, coat, and bigger outer coat to fully experience the brisk cold of November, free to plow through the snow of December under the naked arms of giants whose shoulders they would again perch atop come spring. What if I grew up in a world where I didn't have to wait and wait and wait until that ever-glowing marriage day to be able to express an interest in sex, to be able to have some form of release that wasn't undignified, through certainly don't ever bring it up then or thereafter in "polite" conversation, meaning every conversation I'm ever allowed to have. What if the mental yearnings I endure and suppress were able to flow freely, would I be barbaric as a boy? What if I had physical release and flexibility and free-spiritedness as a boy in his adventures toward manhood, would I experience such an emotional vice through my teen years and beyond as I search for identity, acceptance, and my place, as I

long to release the inner passions that have been subdued and quieted, and quieted so as not to scare away that nice young man, castrated in its passionate desire because “nice young ladies do not do that, feel that, think that.” What if I grew up in a world where my personality was not cut down past the nail bed, where I felt no inhabitation at being who I am, excelling at my strength, stating my opinions, and daring to find and then pursue the world I feel called to fulfill, contributing more than 2.5 children, a spic-n-span household, smoothly run PTA meetings, and the best apple pie at church functions--fully alive and resilient in my audacity to penetrate the inner workings of the mind, to reach the outer limits, to define a new truth. Or what if my imagination created such a world all along, dwelling in its delightful dexterity, nurturing my soul, and letting my voice wail and scream and whisper, remembering the words through the hellish onslaught of what the outer world tells me I cannot, am not, be not. Through the doubting, crushing weights of burning lost confusion, what if I held fast the rope I’ve woven and now stand victorious anyhow.

Lingering Walls

Years of lies to cover pride;
Pride in which I wish not have.
For deepest thoughts walled inside,
Feelings that I hate to hide.

Terrible pains grab me,
As I look in much disgust.
A wall I wish to not see,
This evil that keeps me hushed.

A wall I built to protect,
Is now killing me inside.
I have started to neglect,
Love that I now alas hide.

I would smash all these walls down,
If I knew what it would take.
But now I'm down on the ground,
Not sure how much I can take.

If only one brick would move,
Or perhaps push out of place.
I could see all I would lose,
And maybe could lose my face.

Walls would tumble with my conceit,
Leaving me open to scorn.
However My Love is so sweet,
I would only be reborn.

Goodbye to Brubba

It was around seven and I had just sat down to another of my mother's country style dinners. There was fried chicken, mashed potatoes , green beans and, of course the sweet ice tea with just a touch of lemon, that she always prepared for me. It was a known fact among my friends that there was always a hot meal to be had at Momma Buke's.

Abruptly, the phone rang before I could taste the first bite. "Who could that be?" I asked myself. Almost begrudgingly I picked up the phone. "Hello, who? Hey Brubba!" I replied. " What, hum..... Sure I am off from school this week. We could get togethertomorrow I guess. Does that sound all right? O.K. I'll see you in the morning at your Mom's."

That was my friend Pat from Asheville. Oh the times we've had. When we were younger we were the terror of the town; Pat, Ted and of course Billy. Pat wanted the old gang to get together, or what was left of it, one more time.

Pat was one more character. He was younger than Billy, Ted and I. He was always small and had the Napoleon attitude if ever there was one. From the time he was twelve he decided he was going to keep up with the biggest S.O.B. in the crowd. He started working out everyday like a fiend. He wanted to get big but somehow he never did, but by god, he sure got strong. Little bastard would fight a circle saw.

He was a handsome little wop. He favored Tony Danza and the girls all loved him. He was proud of his Italian heritage and could talk more junk than a Chinese radio. He was such a ladies man that when we went out, he would often pick up girls for the whole gang.

Back in those days I was a bit of local celebrity. I played drums with a real hot band and I was no slouch with the girls myself. What a team we made. Sometimes we would use the line that we were brothers when we were picking up girls.

"Da brubbas" as we called ourselves was our little gang. I guess gang is an appropriate term cause we were definitely a

bunch of rogues. It consisted of Ted, a Vietnam vet who never really came home, Pat, myself and of course Billy, A.K.A. "ole Will the Pill." Billy and I were always extremely close. He and Ted were a couple of years older than Pat and I. They both got caught in the draft. Billy got lucky. He was stationed in Germany. Ted went to Nam.

I guess you say Billy came home and Ted didn't. Ted was a hero of sorts. He was an airborne ranger and received a purple heart. One night on patrol he killed a kid thinking it was the Kong. He went bonkers and they gave him a general discharge. About eight years ago he wrapped himself up in a red, white and blue flag and shot himself. You never would have believed anybody who laughed so much could kill himself.

The four of us spent our summers camping and fishing. We stayed in the woods. We set up camp on the Davidson River at a place called Horse Cove. We all were hippies in those days and no one worked very regular, if at all. Somehow we made do. We always had beer and taters and a steak or two, or a least a hamburger for all. We would go for the Fourth and stay for an entire week and a couple of times for more than a week. It took one day to set up camp and another to carry in the beer. What a time we had!

Now that Will, he was another story. He was one of the toughest rascals I ever knew. When he shook hands he would always check your grip to see if he could make you say uncle. Sometimes it took fifteen minutes for us to shake hands. I was stronger than he was but I could never make him give. His face would turn red and I know it was painful but he was all man and would never give in.

Will would butt heads with anybody. He would lower his head like a Billy goat and give you a headache that lasted for days. We used to play a lot of cards, Will, Ted and I. In fact, he taught me to play cribbage and horseshoes, but that was a long time ago. Billy liked to get loaded, but I guess we all did back then.

I pulled into Asheville about eight and drove through the dirty little West Asheville neighborhood where Pat lived. I don't know where people get the idea that Asheville is such a pretty town. To me it's always been a dirty slum with old black men standing in front of the Seven Eleven bumming change to "build

a bottle of wine" and then there is "Diaper Hill" where young white trash girls hang out their black panties and the undergarments for their illegitament children.

You know I guess it depends on which side of town you come from what you notice. I never could figure Pat. He came from the right side of the tracks. He always wanted to be a "dirty white boy" and he sure was one. He dropped out of school when he was sixteen and he's been dropping out ever since.

I pulled down in front of the old Hall Fletcher School and there he was. "Hey Brubba," I called out. "Hey Brubba," he replied. He got in the car and shut the door.

"Do you know how to get there?" I asked.

"Yeah he is living with Debbie in Swannanowa. It's a little white house over behind Gene Lummis' motorcycle shop. You know where that's at don't you?"

"Yeah," I answered.

We were both quiet and the mood was somber. That was a first. Pat and I always laughed and gibbered like a bunch of monkeys but today things were different. By the time we arrived at Will's place, Hospice was already there. His sister Debbie was standing at the door crying. She rushed up to hug Pat. She merely spoke to me and that was fine. She never really liked me. I was a bad influence and when Will and I were together we always drank and got in trouble.

I took a deep breath and walked inside. Sue, his other sister smiled at me and "Lulu" as we called his daughter sobbed as she wrapped her arms around me. "He's in there" she said and pointed to the door.

Pat and I walked in and there he lay. I tried to pretend I wasn't shocked. It didn't really matter he didn't recognize me. He stared blankly ahead and there were tombstones in his eyes. He resembled a ghoul more than my old friend. Pat sat on the bed with him and rubbed his hand.

"Hey brubba," Pat spoke but Billy couldn't answer. "Here" he said unwrapping a package. "I brought you a T-shirt". No reply. A tear rolled down Pat's cheek as I placed my hand on Billy's shin. The hands that used to grasp mine so firmly had withered to nothing and his once sturdy arms, lay limply at his side like two small ropes one might use to anchor a small fishing boat to a dock.

They told us he had not been able to eat since Friday and his frail jaws could not chew the morphine pills the hospital had given him. All at once he looked at Pat and smiled. He tried to raise his arms to hug Pat. He didn't have the strength and Pat had to help him. He looked at me and smiled as best he could. I leaned over and hugged him for a few moments and I could not hold back my tears.

Sue came to the door and said "The ambulance is here." I got up but Pat sat there and held his hand until the attendant asked him to leave. We stood outside by the ambulance and waited for the gurney to pass through the front door. The attendants were kind enough to stop and let me hold his hand one more time. I bent over and kissed him on the forehead. "Goodbye brubba," I said.

After a few moments we both walked to the car as the ambulance slowly pulled off. We got in and I drove slowly away. Neither of us spoke. I pulled into the first convenience store I passed and bought us two tall Budweisers because Pat was broke. I took the road down behind Warren Wilson College and pulled off on a side road near the river where we used to swim in the summer.

We stood there quietly in the morning sun and drank our beers. When we finished I tossed my beer high in the air. It spun end over end as the last drops from the can sparkled in the sun. As the can broke the surface of the river I said "Good-bye Brubba," one more time. Pat followed suit and we got in and drove away. Goodbye, Brubba.

Picture by Candlelight

The candle flame is the peak of a mountain,
a twinned peak,
a flexible brother,
a spiritual brother
that could melt stone.

The picture framed is mine,
My memory reflected
by candlelight.

But sky is bluer than remembrance,
shadows deeper,
contrast more alluring.

For a moment, I wonder:
What was it like?
Was I the photographer,
the lucky tourist,
the connoisseur of beauty who
took a thousand shots and
framed one.

This one.

In dimness, fierce peaks of
mountains move.
Light is shifting every moment so
I use the shallow bowl of
recollection to contain and remember:
I was there.

Sara's Baby

Sara wraps thread on a spindle,
around her core;
Carefully stranded—thin, thick
sliding through her fingers, varying speeds.

Around her core
a baby's blanket, soft
slides through her fingers at varying speeds,
announcing the expected.

A baby's blanket, soft,
carefully stranded—thin, thick,
announcing the expected.
Sara wraps the thread on a spindle.

Withdraw

I pray for points of blue-eyed reference,
may you grow release because

Smelling the white powder is killing yourself
with your own ashes.

How can substance seep so easily into cracks,
how can I crack the steel?

You fight so hard for your pain of wrinkled brain,
decisions of days and nights confused.

I rub the grease out of your blood through your back,
the only part of you I can touch.

I imagine I can knead the poison out of your head
with tired, sticky hands.

Silver Maples

In the thirties Highway 221 was moved to the middle of North Cove valley, straightened out, and paved. The State of North Carolina, aware of the stunning beauty of the drive northward, with the imposing view of Hawksbill Mountain standing as a proud sentry over the fertile valley, decided to improve the scenery by planting silver maples in nice neat rows all along the new highway. Convicts planted hundreds of them, all the way up and down the new road from the city limits of Marion to the foot of Linville Mountain where the road starts its steep climb to Linville Falls.

The people of North Cove were farmers who grew corn, wheat, oats and soy beans in the flat rich soil between Honeycutt and Linville Mountains. Silver maples have a nasty habit of growing big shallow roots that quickly spread out from the trunk to lap up the rain and put an end to any other plants trying to invade the shade. You can see the big roots right under the surface. Plows and silver maple roots are natural enemies. Besides, the roots take up valuable land where two or three rows of corn or a peck or so of wheat or oats can grow.

Dean Sneed, a big burly, sandy headed farmer with a ruddy sun beaten complexion, did not like the maples. Not one to sit back and let the world pass, and always the one to start something, good or bad, Dean decided to wage a one man protest against the beautification project. I guess it would be considered non-violent but it was certainly not passive resistance. Dean, without hesitation, followed a few days behind the state beautification road crew, digging up the little silver maples then returning them to the same holes with the roots waving in the air like the locks of Medusa, their tender branches buried firmly in the good earth.

After finishing his rearrangement of the beautification project, Dean proceeded to announce to the world through whatever minimal media there was, the McDowell News, mouth to mouth, and letters that the State Highway Department didn't know its ass from a hole in the ground, nor which part of a tree should

go in the hole if they figured it out.

Dean's actions started the great North Cove tree rush. All of the North Cove folks proceeded to go to the highway and abscond with the trees to set in their yards for protest and for shade. The state quietly gave up the project.

Two of the trees shaded the yard in front of the little frame house where I grew up. The grass was thin and yellow over the sprawling roots, but we did not care. The hot summers were a little more tolerable because of the shade of the perfectly shaped trees. They provided an aerial haven where my brother and I exercised our most primitive ancestral instincts for survival and play above the adult world. For some reason the trees attracted thousands of lady bugs. We always thought that the bright red, black bespeckled little crawling sometimes flying bugs, were a sign of good luck. "Lady bug, lady bug fly away home!" we chanted. If she flew from a finger tip, luck was ours.

Our house was simple and functional. It had a single gable running the length, built shotgun style for circulation of the hot summer air. The valley floor was warmer than the mountains surrounding it. We had no bathroom, except the one fifty yards away with its spider webs and grayed planks. My brother and I usually went to the woods on the "Red Hill" behind the house instead of using the smelly outhouse. "Red Hill" included our playground, our toilet, and the household trash pile. The red clay, not so common as mountain soil, was my mother's bane on wash-day.

Mom was a consummate housewife and mother, always cleaning, cooking and sewing. She never stepped out of her role even when Dad fell in debt, lost his job and moved her away to Hickory for a minimum wage job in a cotton mill. While they were away from North Cove, our little house burned. Its loss signaled the end of an enchanted childhood without worry, filled with love, relatives and innocence.

Mom, now widowed and alone, lives in a little house built by a summer vacationer from the coast just beside Highway 221. She bought the house with rent from two old mobile homes that sit where our house burned.

Mom has a lawnmower fetish. At eighty-five she must keep her little yard perfect. Every blade of grass must be cut, every weed dispatched. She hates dandelions and has the greenest thumb I have ever known. She maintains three lawnmowers and

becomes melancholy in winter when she can't mow. She is living proof that lawnmowers are the best prevention for osteoporosis. Her yard is about an acre and growing, expanding into an adjacent field. She even pushes her lawnmower a quarter of a mile away to mow around the mobile homes, or a quarter of a mile the opposite direction to mow the cemetery where Dad is buried.

Only one of the big maples holding the neatness of my childhood and my carefully arranged memories still stands. It now shades a rental, weather-beaten aluminum mobile home with a satellite dish in the yard.

Two of the great silver maples, now about sixty five years old, grace the yard of Doshi Ollis near the course of Old Highway 221. The writhing road clings to the contours at the edge of Linville mountain, hanging stubbornly onto its important past. The recently black-topped road dangerously crisscrosses the Clinchfield Railroad several times, attempting to avoid the great number of coal trains descending the mountains toward Marion and on toward the coast.

Doshi, a lanky ninety year old grayed and frayed woman with a long narrow face and squinting eyes, but with a spry mind and active high pitched tongue, is quick to complain about those old roots growing across her yard. She steps on the rickety porch of her house perched on the side of Linville Mountain and surveys her exquisite view of the valley below and of Honeycutt Mountain on the other side. Although she seems to be unaware of the serene pastoral setting, there is still a demeanor of contentment that comes only with the quiet tranquility of her lonely but beautiful space in the unconscious world. "I'm a gonna git Luke Ed to cut them thangs down," she barks every time I see her. Exchanges of greetings are shortened by reflections on an inadequate past that haunts her lonely days since her husband, Edward, a railroad man who quit his job before getting his full pension, died when she was about fifty.

Doshi lives on social security and is always at her little wood frame house built on what the old farmers would consider useless land. The house, with two front doors facing the valley, was built from the sawyers' shacks left behind when the big lumber camp moved down off of Linville Mountain in the 1920s. Uncle Sam Ollis, Doshi's father-in-law, who helped Edward build the house, was a tenant farmer in the big fields in the valley below. Doshi tends a fair sized garden ringed with an electric

fence to keep out the deer. Wayne Ed, her son, breaks up the garden in the fall so winter freezing will soften the clods. When he's sober he helps her weed and care for her patch through the summer. With a little help from Wayne Ed, Doshi still cans and dries almost everything they eat through the winter. She can't afford anything more than her Social Security will buy. Wayne Ed gets a little pension from the military, but it no more than supports his drinking binges. If he does have anything left he loses it playing poker in the woods behind McKinney's store.

Doshi is the daughter of the rebellious Dean Sneed, who was a successful farmer. The Sneed family was among the better off farming families of the Cove. Doshi, however, married into a family who lived in one of the hollows. They had little land except for a garden. Eligible boys were few in little North Cove and Edward was a good looking, strong young man. The urgency of youth, the security of romance and marriage brought Doshi to the alter.

Today, most conversations with Doshi lapse into lamentations about a lost childhood and the good opportunities sacrificed. She says, "Everhang's gone backards." Yet the family pride of her youth shows through her silver hair and wrinkled face. Even though her life is upside down, she survives.

My mother and Doshi talk with each other every few days, lamenting the loss of another of their generation or comparing their aches and pains.

The Matador

He glanced at me with his sad hazel eyes
With blood drooping on his forehead
And remains of a greasy, dry and sandy hair
He looked at me from top to bottom
Calm, serene, cold and sad looks
Looks of a wise man who has seen all
His mouth was dry and bleeding
He was thrown on the ground
With no energy to move and stand up
Very thin legs with no shoes
Flies resting on his wounds with no bandage
A little piece of cloth covering his belly
His ribs almost showing under the skin
As he breathed slightly and slowly
His arms almost non-existent
So weak he could not put them together
He stared at me without moving
His eyes said the entire story
The story of being in the wrong place
At the wrong time for the wrong purpose
Falling a victim in a world he never chose
A world that promised rainbows and sunshine
And could not grant him food, water and shelter
His family was killed in mobs sweeping the streets
And all is left is the remains of a house
Of a shelter he once lived in with his mother
A small neighborhood he used to play in
All in the name of freedom and liberation
That only brought him pain and starvation
Our eyes met and I wished I could answer him
Explain to a child why he was suffering
Yet, all he needed was not love or a political stand
He needed food, shelter, water and a hospital

I walked away with millions of people
Turned my back to a child's cry for help
A child who was not part of a war
But who had to pay the price
Without ever knowing why or what for.

The Geography of Desire

This is the letter I always write,
no matter who you are.
Whether your roof is tile or slate,
whether February or late summer.
Always there is longing,
the trembling of a fountain.

Memory is a fisherman's boat
loose in the channel,
flotsam drifting upstream.

This is the letter I always write.
And after the ink has dried,
after the text is read,
where does vision rest—

on the tease of the horizon,
the sigh of a wave washed in
before it turns? As turn it must,
as my life turns
from what it might have been.

Lament for Lorca

Oh longing without mouth,
dream of green with no branch,
you have silenced the fountain
with stone.

Muse without art,
desire without flesh,
you have torn the beating
from the chest,
plundered the moist breath.

How could you remove
the gesture from the hand,
the artist from the trance?

Shadow

Sighing a lip print
onto a cigarette,
I tell my friends
I can't live without love.
When we move to leave our table
I rise towards a dark face
and it begins again.
My arms snake above my head,
his heels strike the floor.
There's a spell
in the pull of the shadow.
Above my ear a flower,
shoes staccato,
I turn on the arch of his brow.
This is the true religion,
the matador fixed in the eyes
of the bull. All night
we circle in dream
until we moan and I'm born again
from the side of a man.

Night Run, Fourth of July

A dozen Fourths after you were gone I laced up
my old Nike's in tribute to your favorite evening habit.
Municipal fireworks occupied the nearby park, so I
toured the neighborhood, streets lined with spectators

too lazy to fight crowds. They reclined in plastic loungers,
sat cross-legged on blankets, waved frazzled sparklers
in the night air. I took an easy stride, thinking of the
last time you came in from a run, arm hairs glistening

like a sunrise dew, two fingers on your aorta, counting
a pulse rate, and I began to push the pace, the muscles
in my legs burning after a few hundred yards, my stamina
a thing of memory, chest throbbing like a hammered thumb.

Just then the first explosion ruptured overhead, a brilliant
outburst of fire just beyond the treeline, smoke spreading
in a blackened star, and the spectators whistled in my ear,
shrill shrieks of delight, as I felt the glow upon my face,

ignoring the slipknots in my calves, the stitch in my side.
I gathered my strength. I told myself the crowd had assembled
on my behalf, and that maybe even you were present
somewhere along the curb, watching me, pulling for me,

your forgiving eyes resurrected in the face of a child,
perhaps that ten-year old girl in tank top and cut-offs,
the one tracing the alphabet in blackness with her sparkler,
searing letters into her memory.

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